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CAMPING WITH  
PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

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By JOHN BURROUGHS

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ARRIVAL AT GARDINER, MONT.

(ENTRANCE TO YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK.)

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# **CAMPING WITH PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT**

**By JOHN BURROUGHS**



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# CAMPING WITH PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

BY JOHN BURROUGHS

AT the time I made the trip to Yellowstone Park with President Roosevelt in the spring of 1903, I promised some friends to write up my impressions of the President and of the Park, but I have been slow in getting around to it. The President himself, having the absolute leisure and peace of the White House, wrote his account of the trip nearly two years ago! But with the stress and strain of my life at "Slabsides," — administering the affairs of so many of the wild creatures of the woods about me, — I have not till this blessed season found the time to put on record an account of the most interesting thing I saw in that wonderful land, which, of course, was the President himself.

## A STORM CENTRE

When I accepted his invitation I was well aware that during the journey I should be in a storm centre most of the time, which is not always a pleasant

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prospect to a man of my habits and disposition. The President himself is a good deal of a storm, — a man of such abounding energy and ceaseless activity that he sets everything in motion around him wherever he goes. But I knew he would be pretty well occupied on his way to the Park in speaking to eager throngs and in receiving personal and political homage in the towns and cities we were to pass through. But when all this was over, and I found myself with him in the wilderness of the Park, with only the superintendent and a few attendants to help take up his tremendous personal impact, how was it likely to fare with a non-strenuous person like myself, I asked? I had visions of snow six and seven feet deep where traveling could be done only upon snowshoes, and I had never had the things on my feet in my life. If the infernal fires beneath, that keep the pot boiling so out there, should melt the snows, I could see the party tearing along on horseback at a wolf-hunt pace over a rough country; and as I had not been on a horse's back since the President was born, how would it be likely to fare with me there?

#### THE PRESIDENT'S INTEREST IN NATURAL HISTORY

I had known the President several years before he became famous, and we had had some correspondence on subjects of natural history. His interest in such themes is always very fresh and keen,

and the main motive of his visit to the Park at this time was to see and study in its semi-domesticated condition the great game which he had so often hunted during his ranch days; and he was kind enough to think it would be an additional pleasure to see it with a nature-lover like myself. For my own part, I knew nothing about big game, but I knew there was no man in the country with whom I should so like to see it as Roosevelt.

### HIS LOVE OF ANIMALS

Some of our newspapers reported that the President intended to hunt in the Park. A woman in Vermont wrote me, to protest against the hunting, and hoped I would teach the President to love the animals as much as I did, — as if he did not love them much more, because his love is founded upon knowledge, and because they had been a part of his life. She did not know that I was then cherishing the secret hope that I might be allowed to shoot a cougar or bobcat; but this fun did not come to me. The President said, "I will not fire a gun in the Park; then I shall have no explanations to make." Yet once I did hear him say in the wilderness, "I feel as if I ought to keep the camp in meat. I always have." I regretted that he could not do so on this occasion.

I have never been disturbed by the President's hunting trips. It is to such men as he that the big

game legitimately belongs, — men who regard it from the point of view of the naturalist as well as from that of the sportsman, who are interested in its preservation, and who share with the world the delight they experience in the chase. Such a hunter as Roosevelt is as far removed from the game-butcher as day is from night; and as for his killing of the “varmints,” — bears, cougars, and bobcats, — the fewer of these there are, the better for the useful and beautiful game.

The cougars, or mountain lions, in the Park certainly needed killing. The superintendent reported that he had seen where they had slain nineteen elk, and we saw where they had' killed a deer, and dragged its body across the trail. Of course, the President would not now on his hunting trips shoot an elk or a deer except to “keep the camp in meat,” and for this purpose it is as legitimate as to slay a sheep or a steer for the table at home.

We left Washington on April 1, and strung several of the larger Western cities on our thread of travel, — Chicago, Milwaukee, Madison, St. Paul, Minneapolis, — as well as many lesser towns, in each of which the President made an address, sometimes brief, on a few occasions of an hour or more.

#### MEETING THE PEOPLE

He gave himself very freely and heartily to the people wherever he went. He could easily match

their Western cordiality and good-fellowship. Wherever his train stopped, crowds soon gathered, or had already gathered, to welcome him. His advent made a holiday in each town he visited. At all the principal stops the usual programme was: first, his reception by the committee of citizens appointed to receive him, — they usually boarded his private car, and were one by one introduced to him; then a drive through the town with a concourse of carriages; then to the hall or open air platform, where he spoke to the assembled throng; then to lunch or dinner; and then back to the train, and off for the next stop — a round of hand-shaking, carriage-driving, speech-making each day. He usually spoke from eight to ten times every twenty-four hours, sometimes for only a few minutes from the rear platform of his private car, at others for an hour or more in some large hall. In Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul, elaborate banquets were given him and his party, and on each occasion he delivered a carefully prepared speech upon questions that involved the policy of his administration. The throng that greeted him in the vast Auditorium in Chicago — that rose and waved and waved again — was one of the grandest human spectacles I ever witnessed.

In Milwaukee the dense cloud of tobacco smoke that presently filled the large hall after the feasting was over was enough to choke any speaker, but it

did not seem to choke the President, though he does not use tobacco in any form himself; nor was there anything foggy about his utterances on that occasion upon legislative control of the trusts.

#### A PRETTY INCIDENT

In St. Paul the city was inundated with humanity, — a vast human tide that left the middle of the streets bare as our line of carriages moved slowly along, but that rose up in solid walls of town and prairie humanity on the sidewalks and city dooryards. How hearty and happy the myriad faces looked! At one point I spied in the throng on the curbstone a large silk banner that bore my own name as the title of some society. I presently saw that it was borne by half a dozen anxious and expectant-looking schoolgirls with braids down their backs. As my carriage drew near them, they pressed their way through the throng, and threw a large bouquet of flowers into my lap. I think it would be hard to say who blushed the deeper, the girls or myself. It was the first time I had ever had flowers showered upon me in public; and then, maybe, I felt that on such an occasion I was only a minor side issue, and public recognition was not called for. But the incident pleased the President. "I saw that banner and those flowers," he said afterwards; "and I was delighted to see you honored that way." But I fear I have not to this day



**THE PRESIDENT WITH MR. BURROUGHS AND SECRETARY LOEB  
JUST BEFORE ENTERING THE PARK.**

From stereograph, copyright 1906, by Underwood & Underwood, New York.



thanked the Monroe School of St. Paul for that pretty attention.

#### GRATIFYING THE CHILDREN

The time of the passing of the presidential train seemed well known, even on the Dakota prairies. At one point I remember a little brown schoolhouse stood not far off, and near the track the school-ma'am, with her flock, drawn up in line. We were at luncheon, but the President caught a glimpse ahead through the window, and quickly took in the situation. With napkin in hand, he rushed out on the platform and waved to them. "Those children," he said, as he came back, "wanted to see the President of the United States, and I could not disappoint them. They may never have another chance. What a deep impression such things make when we are young!"

#### COWBOY FRIENDS

At some point in the Dakotas we picked up the former foreman of his ranch, and another cowboy friend of the old days, and they rode with the President in his private car for several hours. He was as happy with them as a schoolboy ever was in meeting old chums. He beamed with delight all over. The life which those men represented, and of which he had himself once formed a part, meant so much to him; it had entered into the very marrow of his



being, and I could see the joy of it all shining in his face as he sat and lived parts of it over again with those men that day. He bubbled with laughter continually. The men, I thought, seemed a little embarrassed by his open-handed cordiality and good-fellowship. He himself evidently wanted to forget the present, and to live only in the memory of those wonderful ranch days, — that free, hardy, adventurous life upon the plains. It all came back to him with a rush when he found himself alone with these heroes of the rope and the stirrup. How much more keen his appreciation was, and how much quicker his memory, than theirs! He was constantly recalling to their minds incidents which they had forgotten, and the names of horses and dogs which had escaped them. His subsequent life, instead of making dim the memory of his ranch days, seemed to have made it more vivid by contrast.

When they had gone, I said to him, "I think your affection for those men very beautiful."

"How could I help it?" he said.

"Still, few men in your station could or would go back and renew such friendships."

"Then I pity them," he replied.

#### RANCH LIFE THE MAKING OF HIM

He said afterwards that his ranch life had been the making of him. It had built him up and hardened him physically, and it had opened his eyes to

the wealth of manly character among the plainsmen and cattlemen.

Had he not gone West, he said, he never would have raised the Rough Riders Regiment; and had he not raised that regiment and gone to the Cuban War, he would not have been made governor of New York; and had not this happened, the politicians would not unwittingly have made his rise to the Presidency so inevitable. There is no doubt, I think, that he would have got there some day; but without the chain of events above outlined, his rise could not have been so rapid.

Our train entered the Bad Lands of North Dakota in the early evening twilight, and the President stood on the rear platform of his car, gazing wistfully upon the scene. "I know all this country like a book," he said. "I have ridden over it, and hunted over it, and tramped over it, in all seasons and weather, and it looks like home to me. My old ranch is not far off. We shall soon reach Medora, which was my station." It was plain to see that that strange, forbidding-looking landscape, hills and valleys to Eastern eyes utterly demoralized and gone to the bad, — flayed, fantastic, treeless, a riot of naked clay slopes, chimney-like buttes, and dry coulees, — was in his eyes a land of almost pathetic interest. There were streaks of good pasturage here and there where his cattle used to graze, and where the deer and the pronghorn used to linger.

## OLD NEIGHBORS

When we reached Medora, where the train was scheduled to stop an hour, it was nearly dark, but the whole town and country round had turned out to welcome their old townsman. After much handshaking, the committee conducted us down to a little hall, where the President stood on a low platform, and made a short address to the standing crowd that filled the place. Then some flashlight pictures were taken by the local photographer, after which the President stepped down, and, while the people filed past him, shook hands with every man, woman, and child of them, calling many of them by name, and greeting them all most cordially. I recall one grizzled old frontiersman whose hand he grasped, calling him by name, and saying, "How well I remember you! You once mended my gunlock for me, — put on a new hammer." "Yes," said the delighted old fellow; "I'm the man, Mr. President." He was among his old neighbors once more, and the pleasure of the meeting was very obvious on both sides. I heard one of the women tell him they were going to have a dance presently, and ask him if he would not stay and open it! The President laughingly excused himself, and said his train had to leave on schedule time, and his time was nearly up. I thought of the incident in his "Ranch Life," in which he says he once opened a cowboy

ball with the wife of a Minnesota man, who had recently shot a bullying Scotchman who danced opposite. He says the scene reminded him of the ball where Bret Harte's heroine "went down the middle with the man that shot Sandy Magee."

Before reaching Medora he had told me many anecdotes of "Hell Roaring Bill Jones," and had said I should see him. But it turned out that Hell Roaring Bill had begun to celebrate the coming of the President too early in the day, and when we reached Medora he was not in a presentable condition. I forget now how he had earned his name, but no doubt he had come honestly by it; it was a part of his history, as was that of "The Pike," "Cold Turkey Bill," "Hash Knife Joe," and other classic heroes of the frontier.

#### BAD LANDS AND BAD MEN

It is curious how certain things go to the bad in the Far West, or a certain proportion of them, — bad lands, bad horses, and bad men. And it is a degree of badness that the East has no conception of, — land that looks as raw and unnatural as if time had never laid its shaping and softening hand upon it; horses that, when mounted, put their heads to the ground and their heels in the air, and, squealing defiantly, resort to the most diabolically ingenious tricks to shake off or to kill their riders; and men who amuse themselves in bar-rooms by shoot-

ing about the feet of a "tenderfoot" to make him dance, or who ride along the street and shoot at every one in sight. Just as the old plutonic fires come to the surface out there in the Rockies, and hint very strongly of the infernal regions, so a kind of satanic element in men and animals — an underlying devilishness — crops out, and we have the border ruffian and the bucking broncho.

The President told of an Englishman on a hunting trip in the West, who, being an expert horseman at home, scorned the idea that he could not ride any of their "grass-fed ponies." So they gave him a bucking broncho. He was soon lying on the ground, much stunned. When he could speak, he said, "I should not have minded him, you know, *but 'e 'ides 'is 'ead.*"

#### THE PRESIDENT'S CORDIALITY

At one place in Dakota the train stopped to take water while we were at lunch. A crowd soon gathered, and the President went out to greet them. We could hear his voice, and the cheers and laughter of the crowd. And then we heard him say, "Well, good-by, I must go now." Still he did not come. Then we heard more talking and laughing, and another "good-by," and yet he did not come. Then I went out to see what had happened. I found the President down on the ground shaking hands with the whole lot of them. Some one had reached up to

shake his hand as he was about withdrawing, and this had been followed by such eagerness on the part of the rest of the people to do likewise, that the President had instantly got down to gratify them. Had the secret service men known it, they would have been in a pickle. We probably have never had a President who responded more freely and heartily to the popular liking for him than Roosevelt. The crowd always seem to be in love with him the moment they see him and hear his voice. And it is not by reason of any arts of eloquence, or charm of address, but by reason of his inborn heartiness and sincerity, and his genuine manliness. The people feel his quality at once. In Bermuda last winter I met a Catholic priest who had sat on the platform at some place in New England very near the President while he was speaking, and who said, "The man had not spoken three minutes before I loved him, and had any one tried to molest him, I could have torn him to pieces." It is the quality in the man that instantly inspires such a liking as this in strangers that will, I am sure, safeguard him in all public places.

I once heard him say that he did not like to be addressed as "His Excellency," he added laughingly, "They might just as well call me His Transparency, for all I care." It is this transparency, this direct, out-and-out, unequivocal character of him that is one source of his popularity. The people do love transparency,—all of them but the politicians.

A friend of his one day took him to task for some mistake he had made in one of his appointments. "My dear sir," replied the President, "where you know of one mistake I have made, I know of ten." How such candor must make the politicians shiver!

#### THE MULE-TEAM

I have said that I stood in dread of the necessity of snowshoeing in the Park, and, in lieu of that, of horseback riding. Yet when we reached Gardiner, the entrance to the Park, on that bright, crisp April morning, with no snow in sight save that on the mountain-tops, and found Major Pitcher and Captain Chittenden at the head of a squad of soldiers, with a fine saddle-horse for the President, and an ambulance drawn by two span of mules for me, I confess that I experienced just a slight shade of mortification. I thought they might have given me the option of the saddle or the ambulance. Yet I entered the vehicle as if it was just what I had been expecting.

The President and his escort, with a cloud of cowboys hovering in the rear, were soon off at a lively pace, and my ambulance followed close, and at a lively pace, too; so lively that I soon found myself gripping the seat with my hands. "Well," I said to myself, "they are giving me a regular Western send-off;" and I thought, as the ambulance swayed from side to side, that it would suit me just

as well if my driver did not try to keep up with the presidential procession. The driver and his mules were shut off from me by a curtain, but, looking ahead out of the sides of the vehicle, I saw two good-sized logs lying across our course. Surely, I thought (and barely had time to think), he will avoid these. But he did not, and as we passed over them I was nearly thrown through the top of the ambulance. "This is a lively send-off," I said, rubbing my bruises with one hand, while I clung to the seat with the other. Presently I saw the cowboys scrambling up the bank as if to get out of our way; then the President on his fine gray stallion scrambling up the bank with his escort, and looking ominously in my direction, as we thundered by.

#### SIDETRACKING THE PRESIDENT

"Well," I said, "this is indeed a novel ride; for once in my life I have sidetracked the President of the United States! I am given the right of way over all." On we tore, along the smooth, hard road, and did not slacken our pace till, at the end of a mile or two, we began to mount the hill toward Fort Yellowstone. And not till we reached the fort did I learn that our mules had run away. They had been excited beyond control by the presidential cavalcade, and the driver, finding he could not hold them, had aimed only to keep them in the road, and we very soon had the road all to ourselves.



## HUGE BOILING SPRINGS

Fort Yellowstone is at Mammoth Hot Springs, where one gets his first view of the characteristic scenery of the Park, — huge, boiling springs with their columns of vapor, and the first characteristic odors which suggest the traditional infernal regions quite as much as the boiling and steaming water does. One also gets a taste of a much more rarefied air than he has been used to, and finds himself panting for breath on a very slight exertion. The Mammoth Hot Springs have built themselves up an enormous mound that stands there above the village on the side of the mountain, terraced and scalloped and fluted, and suggesting some vitreous formation, or rare carving of enormous, many-colored precious stones. It looks quite unearthly, and, though the devil's frying pan, and ink pot, and the Stygian caves are not far off, the suggestion is of something celestial rather than of the nether regions, — a vision of jasper walls, and of amethyst battlements.

With Captain Chittenden I climbed to the top, stepping over the rills and creeks of steaming hot water, and looked at the marvelously clear, cerulean, but boiling, pools on the summit. The water seemed as unearthly in its beauty and purity as the gigantic sculpturing that held it.



**SUNRISE IN YELLOWSTONE PARK.**

**From stereograph, copyright 1904, by Underwood & Underwood, New York.**



altitude is no fun, especially if you try to keep pace with such a walker as the President is. But he could not sit at his ease and let those horses drag him in a sleigh over bare ground. When snow was reached, we would again quickly resume our seats.

As one nears the geyser region, he gets the impression from the columns of steam going up here and there in the distance — now from behind a piece of woods, now from out a hidden valley — that he is approaching a manufacturing centre, or a railroad terminus. And when he begins to hear the hoarse snoring of “Roaring Mountain,” the illusion is still more complete. At Norris’s there is a big vent where the steam comes tearing out of a recent hole in the ground with terrific force. Huge mounds of ice had formed from the congealed vapor all around it, some of them very striking.

#### OLD FAITHFUL

The novelty of the geyser region soon wears off. Steam and hot water are steam and hot water the world over, and the exhibition of them here did not differ, except in volume, from what one sees by his own fireside. The “Growler” is only a boiling teakettle on a large scale, and “Old Faithful” is as if the lid were to fly off, and the whole contents of the kettle should be thrown high into the air. To be sure, boiling lakes and steaming rivers are not common, but the new features seemed, somehow, out

of place, and as if nature had made a mistake. One disliked to see so much good steam and hot water going to waste; whole towns might be warmed by them, and big wheels made to go round. I wondered that they had not piped them into the big hotels which they opened for us, and which were warmed by wood fires.

At Norris's the big room that the President and I occupied was on the ground floor, and was heated by a huge box stove. As we entered it to go to bed, the President said, "Oom John, don't you think it is too hot here?"

"I certainly do," I replied.

"Shall I open the window?"

"That will just suit me." And he threw the sash, which came down to the floor, all the way up, making an opening like a doorway. The night was cold, but neither of us suffered from the abundance of fresh air.

The caretaker of the building was a big Swede called Andy. In the morning Andy said that beat him: "There was the President of the United States sleeping in that room, with the window open to the floor, and not so much as one soldier outside on guard."

The President had counted much on seeing the bears that in summer board at the Fountain Hotel, but they were not yet out of their dens. We saw the track of only one, and he was not making for the

hotel. At all the formations where the geysers are, the ground was bare over a large area. I even saw a wild flower — an early buttercup, not an inch high — in bloom. This seems to be the earliest wild flower in the Rockies. It is the only fragrant buttercup I know.

#### CAPTURING A MOUSE

As we were riding along in our big sleigh toward the Fountain Hotel, the President suddenly jumped out, and, with his soft hat as a shield to his hand, captured a mouse that was running along over the ground near us. He wanted it for Dr. Merriam, on the chance that it might be a new species. While we all went fishing in the afternoon, the President skinned his mouse, and prepared the pelt to be sent to Washington. It was done as neatly as a professed taxidermist would have done it. This was the only game the President killed in the Park. In relating the incident to a reporter while I was in Spokane, the thought occurred to me, Suppose he changes that *u* to an *o*, and makes the President capture a moose, what a pickle I shall be in! Is it anything more than ordinary newspaper enterprise to turn a mouse into a moose? But, luckily for me, no such metamorphosis happened to that little mouse. It turned out not to be a new species, as it should have been, but a species new to the Park.

I caught trout that afternoon, on the edge of

steaming pools in the Madison River, that seemed to my hand almost blood-warm. I suppose they found better feeding where the water was warm. On the table they did not compare with our Eastern brook trout.

I was pleased to be told at one of the hotels that they had kalsomined some of the rooms with material from one of the devil's paint-pots. It imparted a soft, delicate, pinkish tint, not at all suggestive of things satanic.

#### THE MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD

One afternoon at Norris's, the President and I took a walk to observe the birds. In the grove about the barns there was a great number, the most attractive to me being the mountain bluebird. These birds we saw in all parts of the Park, and at Norris's there was an unusual number of them. How blue they were, — breast and all. In voice and manner they were almost identical with our bluebird. The Western purple finch was abundant here also, and juncos, and several kinds of sparrows, with an occasional Western robin. A pair of wild geese were feeding in the low, marshy ground not over one hundred yards from us, but when we tried to approach nearer they took wing. A few geese and ducks seem to winter in the Park.

The second morning at Norris's, one of our teamsters, George Marvin, suddenly dropped dead

from some heart affection, just as he had finished caring for his team. It was a great shock to us all. I never saw a better man with a team than he was. I had ridden on the seat beside him all the day previous. On one of the "formations" our teams had got mired in the soft, putty-like mud, and at one time it looked as if they could never extricate themselves, and I doubt if they could have, had it not been for the skill with which Marvin managed them. We started for the Grand Cañon up the Yellowstone that morning, and, in order to give myself a walk over the crisp snow in the clear, frosty air, I set out a little while in advance of the teams. As I did so, I saw the President, accompanied by one of the teamsters, walking hurriedly toward the barn to pay his last respects to the body of Marvin. After we had returned to Mammoth Hot Springs, he made inquiries for the young woman to whom he had been told that Marvin was engaged to be married. He looked her up, and sat a long time with her in her home, offering his sympathy, and speaking words of consolation. The act shows the depth and breadth of his humanity.

#### TRAVELING ON SKIS

At the Cañon Hotel the snow was very deep, and had become so soft from the warmth of the earth beneath, as well as from the sun above, that we could only reach the brink of the Cañon on skis.



